Other voices

Gay marriage is about more than fairness

OPINION

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As the U.S. Senate prepares to vote in a couple of weeks on whether to consider a constitutional ban on gay marriage, Americans are curiously quiet even though a majority oppose gay marriage.

A nationwide Gallup Poll last month found that 55 percent oppose same-sex marriage (down from 65 percent in December) and 42 percent favor gay marriage (up from 31 percent in December).

Maybe within the context of the Iraq war and disturbing news of beheadings — remember when the subject of "beheadings" never came up in conversation? — gay marriage is way down the list of urgent concerns. "Live and let live" has an irresistible ring to it in such times.

Or, perhaps the lack of interest is tied to the way the debate thus far has been presented. On the pro-gay-marriage side, advocates have proposed the issue only as a question of fairness, civil rights, love and validation. No fair-minded person wants to prevent another human being from equal protection under the law or the pursuit of happiness.

On the other side are mostly heard the voices of the religious right. Regardless of their sincerity, such voices tend to fall on deaf ears in a secular society. If people want preaching, they'll go to church. Moreover, some of the rhetoric from the pews is so strident and off-putting, even devout people may prefer other company.

There are plenty of good reasons to be skeptical about rearranging the basic structure of human society without invoking the "Radicals in Black Robes," who are trying to "force their distorted homosexual marriage views on 280 million Americans," as one Christian Coalition action alert recently put it.

Whatever one may think of homosexual marriage in the abstract, the idea that a redefinition of marriage will have "no effect" is laughable, but not funny. After the nosegay has faded, the issue is neither solely about love nor affirmation, but about serious legal consequences that all Americans may wish to consider before tuning out preachers or embracing gay activists.

For the sake of argument, let's stipulate that this is not personal — it's not about you, in other words — and acknowledge that heterosexuals have royally mangled marriage without any help from gays. Nevertheless, that fact doesn't mean that marriage is doomed or that expanding the definition of marriage to include homosexual unions will make marriage stronger. Or be harmless.

Of particular concern even for the nonreligious is the effect gay marriage could have on two of our founding principles — religious freedom and freedom of speech. Once the courts recognize gay marriage as equal in all ways to heterosexual marriage, then everyone else — including churches — has to recognize gay marriage as equal, too.

Any opposition will be deemed hateful by definition, and anyone who opposes gay marriage will be a hatemonger. Given that many religions and denominations teach that homosexuality is a sin, church attendance alone could suggest you're homophobic. To the extent that one believes or preaches scripture, one is a bigot.

Hence some of the deep concern among legal professionals, as well as theologians. A secular world that ratifies homosexual marriage would provide a legal foundation that would open the floodgates to civil litigation against religious leaders, institutions and worshipers.

In such an environment, churches might be sued for declining to provide their sanctuaries for gay marriages, for example. Ministers could be sued for hate speech for giving a sermon on moral behavior. Churches that protest homosexual unions could face revocation of their tax-exempt status.

The delicate balance between church and state, in other words, is teetering on a high ledge at this moment. It's ironic that those who oppose churches' involvement in state concerns nonetheless have no compunction when it comes to the state dictating what churches can do. Even nonreligious folk should be concerned.

Either we believe in separation of church and state or we don't, but you can't have it both ways.

The July 12 debate is really a discussion about "cloture" — the process by which the Senate puts a time limit on filibuster, thereby allowing a bill to be voted on. In this case, 60 senators have to vote in favor of cloture for the Federal Marriage Amendment, defining marriage as between one man and one woman, to go to the floor for a full vote.

Many senators prefer to delay voting rather than making their position public before the November election. But advocates for the amendment predict that November may be too late, that if President George W. Bush loses re-election, the amendment will be dead and marriage as we know it will be history.

Write to Parker at kparker@kparker.com.

RY UPDATE

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100 PERCENT DIS- ate also approved an m Sen. Harry Reid, restoration of full re- 000 military retirees t disabled.

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mendment would repeal the 10-year phase-out of the offset for 100 percent disabled retirees and allow restoration of retired pay next January.

Ten years is too long to wait for the most severely disabled to win equitable treatment, Reid said.

"Many will simply not live long enough to reap the benefits of full concurrent receipt," he said.

Reid tried to expand CRDP eligibility more ambitiously this year, first to any retirees with disabilities, later to retirees with 40 percent disabilities.

He couldn't find votes or money to support either, an aide said.

The idea of taking a smaller step this year by helping 100 percent disabled retirees surfaced among Nevada veterans and from retired Air Force Col. Win Reither, creator of www.crlegislation.com, a Web site that tracks legislation and policy actions on concurrent receipt.

Reither said his Web site spent more than $8,000 on advertising in Congressional Quarterly during recent months to make lawmakers aware of the need to accelerate CRDP for the most severely disabled retirees.

"The story here is that you just need a good issue and a couple people to put in an amendment that makes sense," Reither said.

The National Association for Uniformed Services touted the merits of ending the 10-year phase-out for 100 percent disabled retirees.

Although the House didn't vote on this issue, Reither said the amendment could survive a House-Senate conference committee.

The cost, $900 million during 10 years, "could be covered using unspent funds from Combat-Related Special Compensation," a second concurrent receipt initiative that hasn't attracted half as many applicants as officials expected.

RESERVE RETIREMENT: An amendment by Sen. Jon Corzine, D-N.J., to lower reserve retirement age from 60 to 55 didn't fare as well.

Warner challenged it on a budgetary point of order, citing almost $2 billion a year in added costs.

A motion to waive those budget rules and allow a direct vote on the amendment ended in a 49-49 tie.

Warner warned Congress that if it continues to "narrow differences" between reserve and active-duty pay and benefits, the services will not only have soaring personnel costs, but also could have an exodus of manpower from active components into the Reserve or National Guard.

Comments or suggestions are welcome. Write to Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centreville, Va. 20120-1111 or milupdate@aol.com or visit Philpott's Web site at www.militaryupdate.com

METH: Larger labs discovered recently

FROM PAGE 1

our community outreach efforts," Metro VNI Cmdr. Kurt Pillard said. "I think everyone is getting smarter at dealing with meth."

Gerhardt said several factors might be responsible for the decline.

Police found many labs simply because patrol officers spotted signs of labs and reported them. Perhaps manufacturers have grown smarter at hiding those signs, Gerhardt said.

The aggressive pursuit of labs, however, meant many manufacturers went to prison. With some players out of commission, some regroup and start over, while others get out of the business, he said.

Businesses have contributed greatly by refusing to sell large quantities of Sudafed and other ingredients used to make meth, Gerhardt said.

A law will go into effect in July making it a felony for retailers to sell precursors to people they suspect or know will use the ingredients to make meth.

"We're now making it very difficult to get their hands on the raw materials," Gerhardt said.

Another factor might be

clamoring for "ice," a type of meth valued for its purity and manufactured mostly in superlabs in California and Mexico.

Gerhardt said ice is no better than other types of meth, but manufacturers have marketed it successfully that way.

"It's coming up from California and Mexico and hitting the streets here hard," he said.

In general, the labs found this year are about the same size as they were last year, Pillard said.

Labs in this region typically are capable of producing ounces of meth every week, rather than the pounds produced in superlabs.

Several busted recently in El Paso County were unusually large, however.

Four suspected labs were found last month at 5010 Ellicott Highway.

At the time, investigators called it the largest one they'd seen this year.

Another suspected lab found this week at 2033 Mount Washington Ave. was so well-stocked, it was capable of producing twice the amount of an average lab, Pillard said.

"They could have been cooking meth every day of the week," he said.